

Laurentian Valley, Pembroke give money to get doctors

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- Laurentian Valley council has decided to assist the Upper Ottawa Valley Medical Recruitment Committee by helping provide a financial incentive to attract new doctors to the area.

Overall, the municipality has agreed to contribute \$70,240 to the pool of funds being amassed by the committee from the other partner municipalities.

Council opted to incorporate a special allocation of roughly \$25,000 a year towards physician recruitment into the Laurentian Valley operating budget for three years.

Currently, physician recruiter Teri Jones and committee member Lt.- Col. Jim Kile are making presentations to the councils of Bonnechere Valley, Laurentian Valley, Pembroke, the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan and North Algona Wilberforce to seek support.

The presentations began last week in Bonnechere Valley where council agreed to contribute roughly \$30,000. Following Tuesday's presentation to Laurentian Valley, Ms. Jones and Lt.-Col. Kile made a presentation to Pembroke council seeking approximately \$90,000.

At Tuesday night's council meeting, Ms. Jones updated Laurentian Valley's council members regarding recent recruiting efforts.

"The recruiting has been done and thanks to the appeal of our area we are in a prime position to secure physicians who want to come to the valley," Ms. Jones said. "We've done everything in our power. They (doctors) want to come, so what's stopping them?"

"Physicians are being approached and courted by other communities that are offering incentives. A modest incentive is the difference," she said.

Ms. Jones insisted that she is not looking at getting into a bidding war with other regions, however, she said a 'thank you' type incentive to help offset a graduating physician's substantial student loan was the difference between attracting a doctor and not.

"There is an immediate need to have a financial incentive package or we'll lose these doctors," she said.

Ms. Jones said she is in contact with medical students who will graduate this June who love the area and are willing to come here, but who want to know if the area will offer them something financial.

"Physicians are out there, about to come out of school, residents who are ready to work and they have the opportunity to pick and choose where they will go. They want to come here but others are offering them a

huge cheque. They're not looking for a huge cheque, but something to help them get started," Lt.-Col. Kile said.

He said the committee needs urgent financial support as there are physicians graduating in 2009 and 2010 who are willing to come here.

He said the money provided by the municipalities will be held by the municipalities until it is needed. The idea, he explained, is to let Ms. Jones know she has money behind her when she is at the bargaining table with the physicians, allowing her to say 'yes, we can meet your requirements.'

The pool of orphaned patients on the committee's list is currently about 3,000. A new physician, according to Lt.-Col. Kile, could take on about 1,500 patients.

Councillor Steve Bennett asked how long physicians would have to commit to the area.

Lt.-Col. Kile said five years. Councillor Debbie Robinson, who

is also the chairwoman of the recruitment committee, congratulated Ms. Jones for her hard work and credited her with bringing recruitment efforts to where they are now.

"We need to take the next step," Ms. Robinson said. "These doctors are waiting for an answer and while we wait, they are being courted by other municipalities."

The funding agreed to by Laurentian Valley is over and above the regular per capita amount allocated annually to the recruitment committee.

Later in the evening, Ms. Jones and Mr. Kile made the same appeal to Pembroke council, requesting the city pay \$98,960, its share of being a partner in the recruitment committee.

Council agreed to this, saying it understood other communities are doing the same thing.

Council passed a resolution agreeing to set up a reserve fund into which the city will place \$30,000 annually to fund its share of securing doctors for the area. Once the initial commitment of \$98,960 is met, the city will continue funding it until council is satisfied the number of physicians serving the area is sufficient.